

Setting The Record Straight:

Critics Of Colombia Trade Agreement Ignore Facts

Speaker Pelosi Stops The Clock On Trade Agreement, Casts Aside Remarkable Progress By Critical Ally And Ignores Economic Impact Of Decision

"In discussions about the Colombia free trade agreement, some members of Congress have raised concerns about the conditions in Colombia. President Uribe has addressed these issues. He's addressed violence by demobilizing tens of thousands of paramilitary figures and fighters. He's addressed attacks on trade unionists by stepping up funding for prosecutions, establishing an independent prosecutors unit, and creating a special program that protects labor activists. ... If this isn't enough to earn America's support, what is? President Uribe has done everything asked of him. While Colombia is still working to improve, the progress is undeniable – and it is worthy of our support."

– President George W. Bush, 4/7/08

Speaker Pelosi has also made clear she is using this agreement as a political power play, saying "if you're in a conversation with someone and they have all the cards, you're not likely to have a winning hand," Pelosi told reporters afterward. "Now the leverage is with us." ("House Gives Leaders Power To Stop Fast-Track Clock," *The Politico*, 4/10/08)

The need for this trade agreement is too urgent and the stakes for national security are too high for Congress to waste time playing politics with this vote. Congress needs to move forward with the Colombia free trade agreement and approve it as quickly as possible.

House Ways And Means Chairman Charlie Rangel attempts to justify the House's action to delay the vote, by claiming that President Bush "'forgot' to consult with his panel before crafting the proposed deal with Colombia. 'Let's give the House more time to facilitate an atmosphere to allow the members [to] know what's in the bill.'" (Alexander Bolton, "House Adopts Rule Freezing Colombia Trade Deal," *The Hill*, 4/11/08)

For over a year, President Bush and his Administration have reached out to the House and Senate leadership to build a bipartisan path for consideration of the agreement. The Administration has held more than 400 consultations, meetings and calls on the agreement, led trips to Colombia for more than 50 members of Congress, and worked closely with Congressional leaders from both parties.

The Administration has had at least 27 meetings or calls with Democratic leaders.

Speaker Pelosi calls for additional help for the U.S. economy, but fails to recognize that her decision to block the trade agreement weakens the U.S. economy and isolates U.S. workers from jobs and opportunities around the world. Speaker Pelosi: "We certainly should do more for our own economy before passing another trade agreement." (Nicole Gauvette, "U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Put On Hold," *Los Angeles Times*, 4/11/08)

According to Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, in the over 500 days since the trade agreement was signed, "American exporters have paid more than \$1 billion in tariffs. ... Without this agreement, American businesses, workers and farmers will lose." (Press Briefing With Cabinet Secretaries, The White House, 4/9/08)

Also, the American Farm Bureau estimates that once the agreement is fully implemented, American agriculture will see \$690 million in gains each year, generating another \$1.8 billion in economic activity and supporting nearly nine thousand jobs in the U.S.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says not enough progress has been made: "We're concerned about the violence against labor organizers, workers' organizers, in Colombia and we want to see progress made in that direction." (Nancy Pelosi, Weekly Press Conference, Washington, D.C., 3/13/08)

Homicides of labor unionists dropped from approximately 200 in 2001 to fewer than 40 in 2007, according to the Colombia Ministry of Social Production and National Union School. In response to concerns over attacks on trade unionists, President Uribe established an independent prosecutors unit and created a special program to protect labor activists. Today, approximately 1,950 trade unionists are receiving protection under the Colombian Ministry of Interior and Justice's protection program.

Democrats in Congress refuse to acknowledge the significant progress in Colombia. "We believe there must first be concrete evidence of sustained results on the ground in Colombia, and Members of Congress will continue working with all interested parties to help achieve this end before consideration of any FTA." (Nancy Pelosi, Steny Hoyer, Charlie Rangel, and Sander Levin, Statement On Trade, 6/29/07)

Under the leadership of President Uribe, Colombia has been a strong and capable partner in fighting drugs, crime, and terror. According to the Colombian Ministry of Defense, since 2002, kidnappings have dropped 83 percent, terrorist attacks have dropped 76 percent, and murders have dropped by 40 percent.

Colombia has established a police presence in each of its 1,099 municipalities.

The Colombian government is continuing to battle narcotics trafficking, which provides the funding base for illegal armed groups. These efforts took 500 metric tons of cocaine off the market in 2006 alone, depriving terrorist groups of hundreds of millions of dollars in funds to buy arms and mount attacks. In addition, the Colombian government has extradited more than 600 narcotics traffickers and terrorists to the United States over the past five years.